



—Photo by The Associated Press.
LARRY JOE "RAT" PURKEY, 21, talks from near his death row cell at Parish Prison Friday to his mother in Indianapolis, Ind. It was the first time he had ever spoken to her. She gave him up in infancy. Purkey faces death in the electric chair for the slaying of Taylor West McLaurin Jr. of Charleston, W. Va., on Mardi Gras 1968.

Mother's Search for Son Ends on N.O. Death Row

He Is Facing Execution for 1968 Slaying

What might have had the makings of a storybook reunion between a mother and son separated since his infancy will be marred by the fact that he occupies a death row cell in Orleans Parish Prison.

He is Larry Joe "Rat" Purkey, 21, who faces execution for a 1968 Mardi Gras slaying. She is Mrs. Arthur G. Sutton of Greenfield, Ind., who surrendered her son for adoption 20 years ago. They spoke to each other, via telephone, for the first time Friday.

Mrs. Sutton, who said that she had been searching for the son she gave up two decades ago when he was 11 months old, expressed intention of trav-

eling immediately to the Crescent City to meet Purkey after talking to him.

"I always knew I'd find him someday, or we would run across each other on the street, but I didn't think it would be this way," Mrs. Sutton sobbed.

NEW TRIAL SOUGHT

Purkey faces death in the electric chair, but the date of execution is still pending the outcome of an appeal he has made to the U.S. Supreme Court for a new trial on grounds that his confession to the slaying was obtained under duress.

Purkey, a lean, handsome youth with brown hair and blue eyes, was convicted last fall of the murder of Taylor West McLaurin Jr. of Charleston, W. Va., and sentenced to die.

Another youth, James "Bulldog" Cripps, 20, of Mount Pleasant, Mich., was also convicted

of murder in the case and sentenced to death. A third youth, Danny Arthur Franklin, 20, is awaiting trial on the same charge.

Purkey, who told Mrs. Sutton that he had been searching for his real mother for years, also said that he feels sure he will escape the fate prescribed for him by a judge and jury.

GETTING OUT OF JAIL

His mother asked him if he thought he would ever get out of jail.

"I'm positive," he said. "If not, I would not have tried to find you."

"If I get out of here, mamma, we'll have plenty of time together."

During the course of their
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phone conversation, Mrs. Sutton told him that she hoped he had forgiven her for giving him up for adoption.

"I hope you don't hold it against me," she said. "I didn't want to give you up."

She explained that she was 15 when her son was born and that her mother forced her to put him up for adoption. "I didn't want to give up my baby, but my mother said I was too young."

The baby was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth H. Purkey, who now live in New Albany, Ind., and renamed Larry Joe. His own mother had named him Laurence Eugene Baker.

WROTE TO NEWSPAPER

In an attempt to find his real mother, Purkey said that he wrote a letter to the Indianapolis Star telling them that he was awaiting the death sentence and that he would like to find his real mother. He asked anyone knowing her to contact him.

The details he gave of his past led to Mrs. Sutton.

Purkey told Mrs. Sutton over the phone that he had another surprise—that he plans to be married to a girl he met through one of his fellow prison inmates. "All I need is two rings and a license," he said.

"I want to clear my name, marry her and settle down and live a decent life," he added.

'FLYING AXMEN'

According to police, Purkey and Cripps claimed to have

been members of the "Flying Axmen," a motorcycle gang that came to New Orleans for the 1968 Mardi Gras.

A dispute with his foster father resulted in Purkey's running away from his foster parents' home in Jeffersonville, Ind., he told a newsman Friday.

Between then and the time he came to New Orleans with the motorcycle gang, he served a jail term in Florida for auto theft.

He called joining the cycle gang "the biggest mistake of my life."

16 DAYS LATER

Purkey and Cripps were arrested 16 days after the slaying of 24-year-old McLaurin. McLaurin's body was found 10 days after his death by two youngsters who were rowing in the City Park lagoon.

A confession by Purkey was introduced during the trial before Criminal District Judge Frank Shea. They were convicted Nov. 14 and sentenced Dec. 11.

Purkey later claimed that police beat him for an hour the night he and Cripps were arrested.